



UNITED STATES COMMISSION
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD

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THE WORST OF ONE OF THE WORST
CONCENTRATION CAMPS-THE LITTLE CAMP AT
BUCHENWALD-IS NO LONGER A MEMORY BURIED

U.S. Preservation Commission Chair Warren L. Miller Battles for Seven
Years to Build a Memorial For the Victims at
Buchenwald's Forgotten Little Camp

The world assumes that the horrors of the Holocaust and its infamous concentration camps are now well-preserved and documented in text and stone, ensuring remembrance by future generations. But what if the memory of the worst part of one of the worst concentration camps were to have escaped our remembrance efforts? This is what a member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad confronted in 1994 during a visit to the main camp at Buchenwald when he found the site of its notorious Little Camp obliterated and totally over-grown with brush.

Over the last seven years, Warren L. Miller, now Chairman of the Commission, has painstakingly resurrected the memory of the Little Camp by creating a fitting memorial at the site. The suffering of the inmates will soon be honored at a commemoration of the Memorial for the Little Camp at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (March 13) and the opening ceremonies for the Memorial at Buchenwald, Germany (April 14).

Miller raised the funds from private donors, including Little Camp survivors and their descendants. He successfully overcame the challenges presented by the German approval process to ensure that the memory of what the Little Camp inmates endured will not be forgotten. Some of the world's best-known Holocaust survivors; including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel, who as a teenager saw his father die in the Little Camp, and a seven-year-old Meyer Lau, now Israel's Chief Rabbi, were incarcerated there.

The particularly brutal and barbaric conditions at the Little Camp first came to light with the liberation of Buchenwald led by General Patton's troops on April 11, 1945. They

found thousands of inmates, including more than 900 children and teenagers living in conditions beyond description. Soldiers who entered the Little Camp that day would never again be the same. As many as 2000 inmates were housed in each windowless stable that had been originally built for 50 horses. Conditions were so horrific that many American soldiers and main camp prisoners could not bring themselves to go into the Little Camp at the time of liberation.

In the 1950's, the East German Government turned Buchenwald into a massive shrine to anti-fascism and held youth rallies there. The legacy of Jewish suffering was ignored and the Little Camp was left to deteriorate. Today Buchenwald is one of the most visited concentration camps with 600,000-800,000 visitors per year. Nevertheless, at the time of Miller's visit in 1994, there was no remnant of the Little Camp, even though it was known within Buchenwald as the place where the greatest suffering occurred. In his 1995 speech at the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald, Miller announced the commission's intent to build a memorial.

Miller found an especially appropriate architect in Stephen B. Jacobs, a Buchenwald survivor, who donated his services. All plans for the memorial had to pass the scrutiny of the Board of Directors of the Buchenwald Foundation as well as a curatorial council comprised of 15 German historians. Miller with the help of Jacobs and Dr. Volkhard Knigge, the Director of the Buchenwald Foundation, initially had to overcome the obstacle of a moratorium on any further monuments at the Buchenwald site.

He then faced a proposal to have an architectural competition for the design of the memorial after Mr. Jacobs' design was nearly completed. The design also conflicted with a 31-inch height restriction placed on memorials at the site. Another complication occurred in 1999, when the adjoining 1000-year-old city of Weimar was designated as the cultural capital of Europe, attracting over a million visitors to Buchenwald and precluding any construction that year.

By early 2000, the various barriers had taken their toll and the prospects for the memorial began to look dim. However, Miller persevered, raising substantial additional funds and persuading the Buchenwald Foundation to assist the funding. Construction began in the spring of 2001.

The memorial is designed to focus and educate visitors to the pernicious history of the Little Camp. It is built of stone from a site near the quarry where the Little Camp inmates were forced to break and carry stones. The floor is cobblestone recalling the streets from Eastern and Central Europe from where many of the inmates came. The entrance ramp ends with a 90-degree turn into a closed, stark space forcing the visitor to experience a moment of arrival and a sense of confinement. A gnarled, broken tree symbolizing the continuity of life after suffering grows in a triangular space, recalling the triangular badge every prisoner wore. Around the interior perimeter floor are the names of the cities, ghettos, and camps from which the inmates were transported. The powerful inscription on the memorial walls that was written by Miller appears in six languages and depicts the horrors experienced in the camp.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad was created by Congress to recognize that, as a nation of immigrants, the United States has an interest in preserving sites in foreign countries associated with the cultural heritage of its citizens. A focus is placed on groups that were victims of discrimination and genocide during World War II, especially in Eastern and Central Europe. The Commission negotiates diplomatic agreements with foreign governments to preserve and protect sites, and facilitates preservation efforts with private contributions. The Commission's work helps emerging democracies face up to their past and recognize the value of the sites that are of importance to religious and ethnic minorities.